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FAKE RUG AUCTIONS.

ONCE upon a time a remark was made by Phineas T. Barnum, to the effect that the greater the swindle the more willingly the public will patronize it. The great showman's cynical utterance was not without truth, and year after year dishonest businesses spring up, for a while flourish, then languish, to be succeeded by others equally dishonest. Within recent years all reputable firms engaged in the importation of Oriental carpets and rugs have been disturbed over mock auctions or "fake sales" of rugs. To such a proportion has this particular form of swindle been extended that an organization called The Society for the Suppression of Fraudulent Auctions has been called into existence, for the protection of merchants who conduct their establishments upon legitimate methods. In the store of a regular dealer the buyers have an opportunity at least of knowing what they are buying, while the purchasers at so-called rug auctions are doing what at best is not much better than investing in a lottery ticket, and at the worst, imposing upon themselves the rôle of a countryman in a "skin game."

In the matter of floor coverings, the householder who elects to supply his domicile in this direction with Oriental rugs solves the carpeting problem for a lifetime, and there is scarcely a house of any pretensions to-day wherein some examples have not found a place. The admirable wearing qualities and rich appearance would have caused them to leap into popular favor did they not also possess another excellent quality, that of falling into harmony with almost every decorative scheme. This fully deserved appreciation and the general adoption are what have led many swindlers to embark in the rug action business and prey upon confiding citizens. With some honorable exceptions, the auctioneers who sell rugs at retail to the general public are rather a slippery lot. The usual method employed to foist these rugs upon the purchaser is by holding auction sales, either in stores that are vacant and can be rented for a few days, or in the department stores of firms who do not understand the imposition these itinerant dealers seek to practice. The "Oriental merchant" and his American understudy, who usually poses as the "going, going, gone" man, advertise extensively in such papers as will accept their announcements. One or two good rugs are usually hung upon the walls in a conspicuous place, and they not infrequently have "ribbons," that are supposed to represent prizes won at exhibitions, while the other rugs constituting the stock, are not freely displayed, but put near the platform of the auctioneer, and can generally only be seen by gaslight. When the hour for the sale begins the clerks and satellites of the swindler-in-chief bid vigorously, and sooner or later an outsider drifts into the contagious atmosphere of the "connoisseur's" enthusiasm, and enters into the competition for possession of what he believes to be a very fine Oriental rug. The bidding is brought up to a handsome figure by the "puffers" and "cappers," and the stranger within the gates finds the rug knocked down to him. Once sold, the rug is quickly packed, payment made, and the happy customer congratulated upon his "bargain." Apparently the more ridiculous the statement made about a rug, the more readily does the story obtain credence, and the daring and assurance of the unscrupulous vendors are most remarkable. For rugs that would be dear at \$10, these dealers frequently ask \$50, accompanying the demand by a brazen falsehood, that "it once belonged to the Shah's harem," or "it was secured by bribing the muezzin of an old mosque."

Many of the modern rugs, woven by the poorest workmen, colored with the cheapest dyes that produce colors crude and harsh, are treated with a chemical preparation, composed of a solution of borax and caustic soda in water, to mellow the tones and produce the effect of an antique. This is generally followed by a bath of tersulphate of iron, with the final result, after a short use, of the disappearance of all color, and the destruction of the fabric as well. People pay exorbitant prices for rugs therefore that quickly fall apart, and instead of attributing their unfortunate experience to their own stupidity, decide never to buy a rug again. The lesson to be learned is to buy rugs only of merchants or auctioneers of established reputation. It may be borne in mind that it costs a good deal to sell by auction in a legitimate way, for auctioneers receive ten per cent., advertising costs ten per cent. more, and the freight charges for conveying goods from town to town increase the expense of conducting the business by honest methods, and itinerant dealers make their profits by selling far above values. It takes years to acquire real knowledge of the value of rugs, and while there are reputable auctioneers, generally well known and respected in the cities in which they conduct business, the wandering rug minstrel is usually a pleasant but deceptive singer, and as his lay can only be hearkened unto at heavy expense, it should be avoided by those who want genuine goods.

ADA CRISP.

Periodicals.

In *The House Beautiful* for May (Herbert Stone & Co., Chicago), there appears an excellent article by Horace T. Carpenter on "An Artist's Home," being an illustrated description of the domicile of Daniel C. Beard, in Flushing, L. I. This cozy nest appears to be an ideal contrivance, in absolute good taste—not always found in an artist's abode—and those ingenious conveniences which remind one of *multum in parvo*.

The May number of *Brush and Pencil* calls attention to a charming stranger in the art world, who has come to abide with us: Pyrography. An article from Earl H. Reed gives some good technical explanations of this peculiar art. "The Twelve Landscape Painters" are also discussed, not, however, with those critical conclusions to which I could in all cases subscribe. The closing sentence of the article is, however, so true that I like to repeat it. "Conventional treatment has been the death of all the schools of art heretofore, and if we want to have a strong, true American school, our artists have all the science necessary, and they need only to go to Nature and court her with all the enthusiasm of an ardent lover. American art is something already to be reckoned with, and the men who are making themselves famous while developing it are the ones who are faithful, honest, and true to themselves and their native environment."

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The *Temple Magazine* for April contained an interesting article from the pen of that well-known writer, the Rev. F. Hastings, on "Remarkable Continental Pulpits," in which one is described which some years ago I greatly admired while in Brussels. It is the *chaire* in the Cathedral St. Gudule, carved by Verbruggen, which represents in carved wood the expulsion of our first parents from Eden. Various kinds of animals among the foliage are sharing the pain of the first transgression, while the angel with flaming sword is closing the gates of paradise. Above is the Virgin with the child, who crushes the head of the serpent with the cross.

Foreign Notes.

The point made in the last number about the appropriate connection between the Corot and the Impressionist Exhibitions in the Paris Galleries of Durand Ruel, I find also brought out in an article in the *Figaro* of April 21st, by Arsène Alexandre, just received, which space forbids me to republish.

Le Temps, of the 17th of last month, calls attention, in connection with this exhibition, to the lack of representation which the luminarists have found in the Luxembourg, where, as a demonstration of contemporary art, they certainly should find a place.

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The third volume of Professor Bode's "Rembrandt" published by Sedelmeyer of Paris is nearly ready for publication. After correcting the final proof-sheets the learned Berlin director proposes visiting Florence.

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Dr. Theodore Wiegand has been appointed "Departmental Curator of the Royal Museums of Berlin," with an official residence at Constantinople. This post, which was originally founded in Smyrna for Karl Humann in 1884, has been reconstituted in order that the interests of the Berlin Museums in fresh Oriental discoveries may be cared for by a resident expert with a definite position.

* * *
On the 12th of April, died in Paris the famous decorative artist Auguste Alfred Rubé, the *doyen* of his profession. He had attained to eighty-two years, and was distinguished chiefly by his decoration of theatres, in which, for nearly half a century, he had no equal, while, largely in conjunction with M. Chaperon, he worked with great success at the Opéra, Opéra Comique, Comédie Française, and Odéon. His last work is the curtain of the Nouvel Opéra Comique.

* * *
A private society in France has offered to advance a sum of money sufficient for the erection of a new building in place of the present Luxembourg Gallery, which is in a deplorable condition. The only condition asked of the Government is that a small entrance fee be charged on two or three days of the week until the sum expended has been refunded to the lenders. The present building was originally an orangery, and is, according to M. Ralf Derechef, utterly unsuited to the requirements of a picture gallery. It stands on a level with the ground and is roofed as a hot-house; it is therefore